DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 422 622 EA 029 286

AUTHOR McCabe, Donna Hagen; Dobberteen, Kathie Ward
TITLE Women Superintendents: Overcoming Constraints.
PUB DATE 1998-04-00
NOTE 36p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Diego, CA, April 1998).
PUB TYPE Numerical/Quantitative Data (110) -- Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Achievement; *Administrator Characteristics; *Change Strategies; Elementary Secondary Education; Mentors; *Networks; Politics of Education; Risk; *Superintendents; Surveys; *Women Administrators
IDENTIFIERS *Barriers to Participation; *California; United States

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to identify critical constraints as perceived by U.S. and California women superintendents and to determine how these women overcame them. The Survey of Influences on Female Superintendents' Careers (SIFSC) was used in two studies to collect quantitative and qualitative data on women superintendents in the United States and in California. This paper discusses data from three parts of the SIFSC survey: (1) demographics of both groups; (2) mean scores of four constraints deemed most critical by respondents; and (3) respondents' written strategies for overcoming these constraints. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze demographic and evaluative responses. The means of the three most critical constraints from each group were further analyzed for significant differences. Written statements were qualitatively analyzed by looking for themes across data. The superintendents in both studies agreed on three critical career constraints: difficulties in breaking into existing organizational networks, the belief that women cannot handle the superintendency's political aspects; and lack of organizational encouragement to apply for administrative positions. Solutions ranged from seeking mentoring opportunities to becoming involved with different publics, being well-prepared, taking risks, and accomplishing difficult tasks. An appendix of career constraints is included. (Contains 31 references.) (MLH/Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 422 622

Women Superintendents:

Overcoming Constraints

Donna Hagen McCabe

University of Louisville

Louisville, KY

Kathie Ward Dobberteen

La Mesa Dale Elementary School

La Mesa, CA 91941

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, San Diego, CA, 1998. Critique and questions may be sent to: Dr. Donna Hagen McCabe, Assistant Professor, 327 School of Education, University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky 40292; Telephone: 502-852-0618; Fax: 502-852-0616; e-mail: dhmcca01@ulkyvm.louisville.edu. or to Dr. Kathie Dobberteen, Principal, La Mesa Dale Elementary School, La Mesa, CA 91941; Telephone 619-668-5740; e-mail: KathieDee@aol.com

EA 029 286

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. McCabe

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Abstract

The Survey of Influences on Female Superintendents' Careers (SIFSC) was used in two studies to collect data concerning women superintendents in the United States and in California. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected by the survey. Data from female superintendents across the United States and in California were collected and compared. In this paper, data from three parts of the SIFSC survey will be discussed and compared: (a) demographics of U. S. and California women superintendents, (b) mean scores of four constraints chosen as most critical by U. S. and California superintendents, and (c) their written strategies explaining how they overcame those career constraints. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze demographics and the evaluation of these superintendents' perceived career constraints. The means of the most critical constraints, three from U. S. superintendents and three from California superintendents, were further analyzed for significant differences using *t* tests at the .05 level of significance. Written statements of superintendents were analyzed qualitatively by looking for themes across the data. A comparison was made of similarities and differences in the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the women superintendents nationally and in California. The superintendents in both studies agreed on the constraints that were critical to their careers, although there was a significant difference in the means of the first ranked constraint, "the difficulty women experience breaking into organizational networks". Similar strategies were used by both groups to overcome those constraints.

Women Superintendents: Overcoming Constraints

The complex role of modern superintendents has been addressed by several researchers. Carter and Cunningham (1997) emphasized the importance of the superintendency stating, "The American school superintendent is being called upon to take up the challenge of totally rethinking and fundamentally improving American education (p. 242)." Blumberg (1985) emphasized the superintendency as a position of conflict. Konnert and Augenstein (1990) considered the number and the complexity of roles superintendents must play in the 1990s.

One crucial dimension of the modern role of superintendent is gender. Blumberg included only one woman in his study. Nine of forty-two superintendents actively involved in Carter and Cunningham's study were women. Konnert and Augenstein made no distinction between men and women in advising aspirants on how to obtain a position. As more women become district leaders, it is of interest to investigate how successful women perceived the challenges in their paths to the superintendency.

In 1982, only 1.2% of district superintendents were women. Shakeshaft (1989) reported that the number had increased to 4% by 1989. Today, women are in charge of about 7% of school districts in the United States (Glass, 1992). Almost all school superintendents come from the teaching profession (Glass, 1992). Women are 83.5% of elementary teachers and 50% of high school teachers (Shakeshaft, 1989). Women earned 54.9% of doctoral degrees in Educational Administration in 1986-1987 (Snyder, 1989). Women are preparing to be school district leaders in ever

increasing numbers.

During the past ten years, researchers' studies concerning women superintendents of schools have shifted. There has been a widening interest in topics other than demographic data and general information about women superintendents. Researchers have examined skills, knowledge and abilities necessary to obtain and keep that first superintendency (Grogran, 1994), job satisfaction (Wesson & Grady, 1994) and the roles played by the increasing numbers of women who have successfully attained that position.

Although only 7% of all U.S. superintendents in 1989 were women (Shakeshaft, 1989), some states have a larger percentage of female chief school executives. Women make up 18% of the superintendents in California (Dobberteen, 1996) and 10% of those in Missouri (Burns, 1997). The percentage of increase in women superintendents in the past 15 years has almost quadrupled.

Power issues and difficulties experienced by women and minorities within traditional organizational structures have been detailed by Kanter (1976). She attributed the problems of women in organizations to the inherent structure and procedures built into bureaucracies. Ortiz (1982) explored the way women were socialized or learned their roles in school district organizations. Shakeshaft (1989) documented that school administration had become an increasingly masculine profession. Historical studies of the superintendency (Blumberg 1985), have used mostly male superintendents, although the role of female superintendent is now becoming more a focus of research (Carter & Cunningham; 1997, Konnert &

Augenstein; 1990; Grogan, 1994). The development of gender related expectations, the social identity of women, gender-related concerns of women, and gender-related means of communication used by women were addressed by Tajfel (1978), Gilligan (1989), Tannen (1990), Bateson (1990), and St. Claire (1989).

Some researchers suggest that constraints in the careers of women superintendents may emanate from the beliefs that: (a) the position of superintendent of schools has historically been a male role, (b) gender role expectations embedded in society affect the ways that women are viewed by their families and by themselves, and (c) the structure of traditional bureaucratic organizations may serve to facilitate or constrain women.

The focus of this paper is to identify critical constraints as perceived by U. S. and California women superintendents and to determine how these perceived constraints were overcome by these women. A comparison of two studies (Dobberteen, 1996; McCabe, 1996) using the same survey, The Survey of Influences on Female Superintendents' Careers (SIFSC), and the same methodology, may add information to the knowledge of women superintendents by comparing data from a state, California, where 18% of superintendents are women, to data from the national survey in which approximately 7% of superintendents are women.

The women surveyed in this study succeeded in becoming superintendents of school districts across the United States. Knowledge of the leadership role experienced by these women, an understanding of possible constraints experienced by these successful women superintendents, and information about successful

strategies for overcoming any perceived constraints, may assist other women in preparing themselves to become superintendents of schools.

Method

Selection of the Sample

Two populations of women superintendents were used in this study. Using the Directory of Public School Systems in the United States (1996), 735 U. S. women superintendents were identified. Telephone calls were made to districts where names were not easily discerned as male or female. An introductory letter and surveys, were sent to all 735 women. Using the California Public School Directory, 1995, Dobberteen (1996) used similar procedures, sending surveys to 192 identified women superintendents. The U.S. survey was answered by 38% (n = 273) of the identified U. S. women superintendents and 54% (n = 103) of California superintendents

Description of Participants

Demographic data collected in Section I of the SIFSC for both the national survey and the California survey are displayed in Figure 1-3.

(a) Superintendents in both studies were similar in age (see Figure 1). Most U. S. respondents (87.5%) were between the ages of 40 and 59, with 31.5% being 50 to 54. Most of the California respondents (83.5%) were also between the ages of 40 and 59, with the largest group (32%) being between 50 and 54.

Figure 1. Demographic comparison of United States and California women superintendents by age.

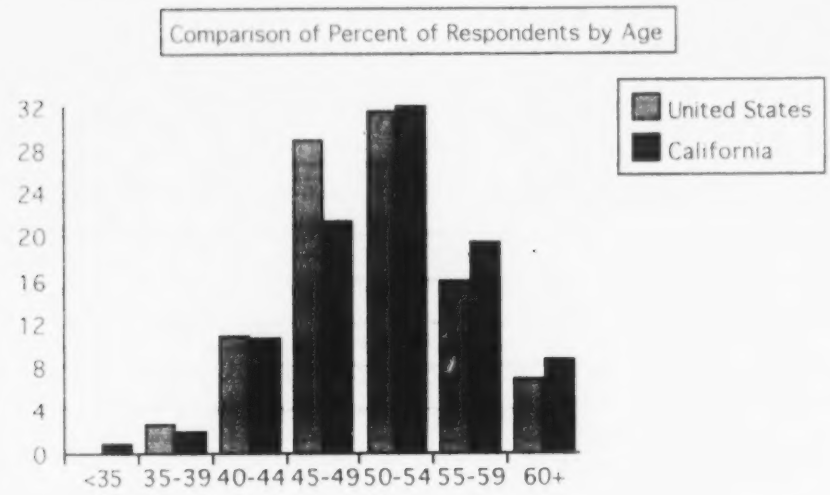


Figure 2. Demographic comparison of United States and California women superintendents for marital status.

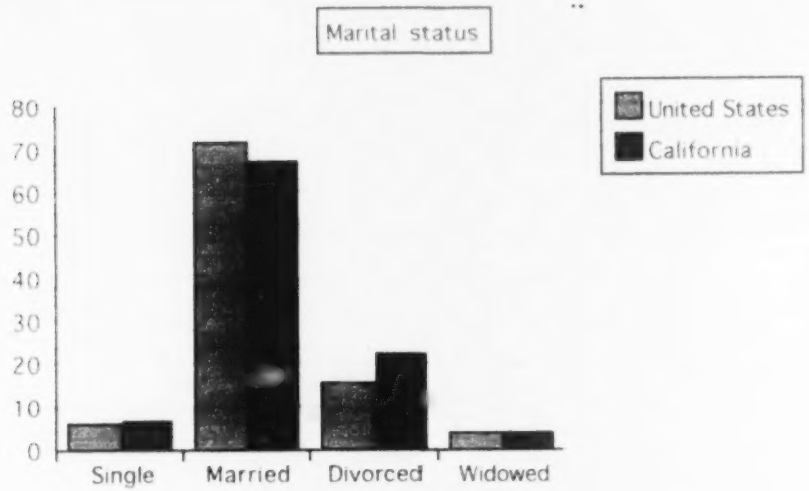
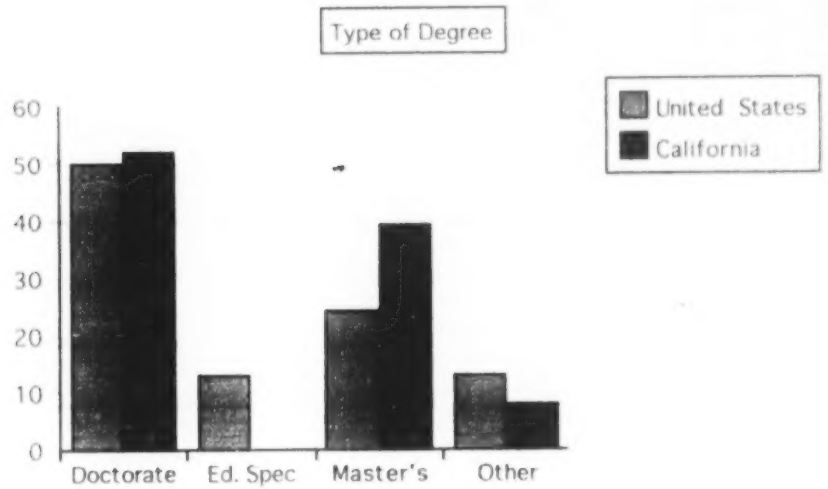


Figure 3. Comparison of educational background for United States and California women superintendents.



b) Approximately 70% of the women in both groups were married (see Figure 2). Of the U. S. women, 71.8%, were married while 67% of the California women were married.

(c) Fifty percent (n = 137) of the U. S. respondents and 52.4% (n = 54) of the California respondents had obtained their doctorates (see Figure 3). While 13% (n = 36) of U.S. respondents had a specialist degree, no one from California reported having a specialist degree. A lesser percentage, 24% (n = 66), of U. S. superintendents held a masters degree as compared to thirty-eight percent (n = 40) of California respondents.

Development of the Instrument

The "Survey of Influences on Female Superintendents' Careers" (SIFSC) (McCabe, 1991) was used in both the U. S. and California study. The survey was divided into six sections and collected data concerning:

1. Demographics,
2. Career Path,
3. Personal-Professional Assessment and completion of the statement, " A superintendent is....".
4. Satisfaction and Efficacy,
5. Perceived constraints on self and other women administrators, and
6. Methods used to overcome any perceived constraints

The SIFSC, based on seven concepts from a literature review of the

superintendency, gender roles of women, and women in organizational structures had undergone a content evaluation and was piloted by women administrators (McCabe, 1992). Women professors of educational administration and women administrators used a Q-sort method to identify five statements based on each of the concepts identified in the literature. The survey was piloted by five women administrators. The seven concepts underlying the 35 statements about constraints in women superintendents' careers (Section VI) of the SIFSC survey were:

1. The role of the superintendent of schools has been historically,and is today, still perceived to be a masculine position.
2. Societal attitudes regarding gender roles may serve to facilitate or constrain career expectations of women.
3. Family routines, practices, and attitudes regarding gender roles may serve to facilitate or constrain career expectation of women.
4. Gender role expectations can lead to self-imposed behaviors that serve to deter career advancement.
5. Stereotypical gender related attitudes and behaviors are expected of women in organizations.
6. Organizational structures and processes serve to facilitate or constrain career progress.
7. When women executives comprise a small proportion of the administrative body of an organization, stereotypical gender related assumptions may be made regarding their organizational behavior.

These seven concepts were the conceptual basis for the 35 statements of possible constraints (see Appendix A) used in Part V of the survey. A five point Likert-type scale was used by respondents to evaluate the statements of perceived constraints on their careers and careers of other women administrators. The SIFSC survey has been used in national and state studies of superintendents (McCabe, 1992; Carpenter, 1994; Burns, 1995; Dobberteen, 1996) as well as this research study.

This paper is based on quantitative data collected in Section V of the SIFSC concerning superintendents' perceptions about possible constraints on their careers and qualitative data collected in Section VI of the survey concerning how these superintendents overcame those perceived constraints. The data collected in this study are compared with an identical survey of California superintendents (Dobberteen, 1996).

Procedure

Introductory letters and 735 surveys were sent to women in 45 states identified as being superintendents of school districts. A reminder postcard was sent three weeks after the initial mailing. Similarly, in California, 192 surveys were sent to California superintendents and reminder cards were mailed after the initial mailing.

The survey collected demographic data and a rating of possible constraints on superintendents' careers. The list of 35 factors identified as constraints were evaluated by the women superintendents using a 5 point Likert-like scale, with 1 being "not at all significant"and 5 being "extremely significant". After evaluating

the constraints, the respondents identified the most critical constraints in their careers by circling three of the 35 constraints in the survey. The superintendents then wrote about their strategies for overcoming those critical constraints.

Data Analysis

Means and standard deviations were computed on the five-point Likert-type scale ratings of the 35 constraints on superintendents' careers collected in Section V of the SIFSC. From this list of 35 constraints, superintendents in both studies chose the three most critical constraints on their career.

Two sample t -values were calculated for the four constraints identified as critical by both U. S. and California superintendents. Probability values (p -values) for the difference in the two sample means were computed for each of the critical constraints chosen by the superintendents.

An inductive analysis of superintendents' written responses was used to determine the underlying themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) revealed in the methods used by U. S. superintendents to overcome perceived constraints. The strategies used by U. S. superintendents were also compared to corresponding strategies reported by California superintendents (Dobberteen, 1996).

Results

Quantitative Data

Women in both of these studies chose three critical constraints from a list of 35 constraints they had rated in Section V of the survey. A total of four constraints were identified by the two groups of superintendents because two constraints were

held in common by both groups (see Table 1).

Both groups ranked the constraint "the difficulty women experience breaking into organizational networks, " as number one. The second ranked constraint nationally was "the belief that women are not proficient in school business management" which was not ranked in the top three by California superintendents.

Ranked second by California and third by U.S. superintendents was "the belief that men are more able than women to handle the political aspects of the superintendency". The third ranked constraint by California superintendents was "the lack of organizational encouragement for women to apply for administrative positions" which was ranked fifth by U. S. superintendents.

Since there is much similarity in the demographic data concerning the women in both of these studies, it might be assumed that perceptions of constraints might also be similar. Both the national and California superintendents had previously evaluated the constraints on the Likert-type scale of the SIFSC. Means of the four critical constraints were in the range of "slightly significant" (2.00) to" moderately significant" (3.00). The ratings by the U. S. superintendent resulted in higher mean scores than the ratings by California superintendents on all four critical constraints.

The means of the critical constraints were further analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference between the paired (U. S. and California) means

Table 1

Highest Ranked Constraints

Constraint	US Rank	US Percent	CA Rank	CA Percent
The difficulty women experience breaking into organizational networks.	1	24.00	1	26.00
The belief that women are not proficient in school business management.	2	12.08		
The belief that men are more able than women to handle the political aspects of the superintendency.	3	11.72	2	16.00
The lack of organizational encouragement for women to apply for administrative positions	5	9.00	3	12.00

Note: Only three constraints were ranked in the California study.

(see Table 2). The mean for the constraint, "the difficulty women experience breaking into existing organizational networks", (U. S. = 3.04 and CA = 2.75) was highest in both studies. There was a significant difference (p = .03) between the means of the U. S. and California studies. There was no significant difference between the mean constraints of the three other critical constraints chosen by both groups of superintendents. Although the U. S. superintendents had ranked all constraints higher than the California superintendents, there was a significant difference between the two groups only on means of the constraint ranked first by U. S. and California superintendents, "the difficulty women experience breaking into existing organizational networks".

The written responses of the superintendents addressed the following four constraints chosen by them as the most critical constraints on their careers:

- the difficulty women experience breaking into organizational networks,
- the belief that women are not proficient in school business management,
- the belief that men are more able than women to handle the political aspects of the superintendency,
- the lack of organizational encouragement for women to apply for administrative positions.

The women shared various methods that they employed, actions that they took, personal qualities that they relied on, and some knowledge skills and abilities that they developed.

Table 2

Comparison of Means of Constraints of Respondents' Own Careers

Constraint	US Mean n=264	CA Mean n=103	Difference	t-value	p-value
The difficulty women experience breaking into existing organizational networks	3.04	2.75	.29	1.90	.03
The belief that women are not proficient in school business management	2.45	2.38	.07	0.46	.32
The belief that men are more able than women to handle the political aspects of the superintendency.	2.63	2.42	.21	1.29	.10
The lack of organizational encouragement for women to apply for administrative positions	2.44	2.19	.25	1.56	.06

Contextual Qualitative Data

Women in both studies wrote about how they had overcome the constraints they had chosen as being most critical in their careers. Common themes were found in the written responses from both studies. Quotations of women in the national study were selected to illustrate those themes.

The Difficulty Women Experience Breaking Into Existing Educational Networks. The difficulty women experience breaking into organizational networks was written about by 49 U.S. superintendents and 7 California superintendents. California superintendents sought improved knowledge and skills, stressed patience and the need to be aligned with powerful peers (Dobberteen, 1996). U. S. women wrote about joining and excelling in committee work in professional organizations and their school districts, being assisted by mentors, working with people in alternative networks, and just being persistent. Superintendents wrote that men, as individuals, (supervisors, colleagues, and professors) were helpful in introducing and sponsoring them in existing networks. They commented on their activities in professional organizations.

> Kept attending meetings, making contributions and developing the reputation of having important contributions to make.
>
> I have been able to overcome the "networking issue" through time, and being competent. Success and integrity speak louder than gender, or at least in my experience.
>
> Joined as many organizations as possible.
>
> I tend to volunteer for committees and chair groups.
>
> To overcome this constraint, I have accepted any and all positions

offered to me to serve on committees which has expanded my network.

Superintendents wrote about the mentors who assisted them before and after they became superintendents.

Found mentors (mostly male) who encouraged me and sponsored me. ...had several male mentors during my career and currently get strong support from several excellent male superintendents.

Through the force of my personality and the mentoring of other female superintendents--the old boys realized that I, and others are here to stay!

Had some wonderful mentors who challenged me to be an active participant yet respectful of what had gone on for years--respect for seniority, etc. that anyone new, regardless of sex, must honor.

...Finding influential educators who were willing to mentor, support and recommend.

The women commented on working with existing networks and forming networks of their own to facilitate their administrative growth.

Tried to build my own network with the men superintendents that I did know.

...joined new women's support group;...

Built networks among women educators as well as men educators...

I formed a network of advisors whom I respected and was not afraid to ask them from time to time how I was doing. Their advice was invaluable.

...and I made connections, built networks and did my own pursuing of goals.

Networking- networking-networking- You must build a support system-both male and female-it is often not what you know, but who you know that gets you that interview to the job you want.

One woman felt it necessary to seek legal redress, stating, "I sued the

professional organizations at the state level to break into the network. I worked hard through service and became respected based on merit. Within 5 years, elected to statewide office."

The theme of tenacity and perseverance was evident throughout the written comments as superintendents wrote about getting more education, striving toward excellence, and developing their skills.

> Be persistent but not "pushy".
>
> Persistence, hard work, honesty, integrity, doing your homework.
>
> Persistent, pleasant determination to prevail--attitude is everything.
>
> Toughness, the right degrees, a successful track record seem to stand up.
>
> Breaking in...it took 5 years but I kept pounding on doors. I also crossed county lines! I always used a male mentor, too.
>
> Believing that I could and would become a superintendent and never losing that confidence helped to overcome the difficulty of "breaking into the good ole' boy's network!

Three of the respondents spoke negatively of networking, explaining how they worked instead.

> I tend to be a very independent person who follows her own instincts...I don't feel I belong to a "network" and I don't really want to belong. I speak with a few male superintendents in neighboring districts but I don't socialize with them, business/working relationship.
>
> I'm still not able to access many networks. I make personal contacts when I need help-and I always get it. But none of the networks volunteer.
>
> Accepted an "outsider" role in the network-A few male superintendents have been very fine mentors.

In summary, superintendents from both studies who perceived networking as a constraint, were persistent in gaining more knowledge and skills; found mentors, often male; became actively involved, and were successful in professional organizations; networked with willing men and women; and established reputations as competent individuals.

Overcoming Constraints Concerning School Business Management. In Section VI, U. S. women superintendents also addressed how they overcome the belief that women were not proficient in school business management. California women did not address this constraint. The most common methods used to counteract this perceived constraint given by 8% of U. S. respondents (n = 24), were seeking additional education, training and experience in school business management and taking advantage of opportunities to exhibit their competency in this area. A sample of their statements are included.

> Took classes, workshops, read profusely to improve and become more proficient.
>
> a. Went to business managers academy, b. Went to superintendents' academy, c. Attended workshops, d. Learned from business/finance managers.
>
> ...I studied the issues, and consulted often and in great detail with 2 female mentors who were seasoned administrators.
>
> ...I made sure to attend every meeting where business was an issue. After 4 years, I had little difficulty convincing the school board of my knowledge and competency.
>
> During my first 3 years as superintendent I demonstrated my ability by: freezing the tax rate; securing a 3.3 million legislative grant; renegotiation of the transportation contract saving 2.1 million over 3 years; using retirement incentives to reduce personnel costs; and

> establishing a stable financial operation. These accomplishments were unique for the district.
>
> I focused on our biggest problem-money-and our most important goal-student achievement and made all decisions with those two goals in mind...By keeping the two goals in mind business management became much easier the second year. Skills ere developed by working with the accountant, the business manager, the service center, any other superintendent or business manager willing to give advice and financial gurus at the (State) Education Agency. This reliance on the two goals stood me in good stead; even if someone felt I lacked an authoritative approach I managed to get a tremendous amount accomplished with consistency of purpose.
>
> I just dug in and showed them.
>
> I sought experience that demonstrated my abilities in these areas.
>
> Some superintendents hired good people to supervise business affairs.

Three superintendents commented:

> Hired 2 other women administrators for our district...we were a great trio and proved them wrong. Put together and passed my first budget w/o raising the tax rate. Promoted and passed a $3.5 million capital project w/no increase in taxes.
>
> To compensate, I hired a business manager to handle finance under my guidance...In other words, I accentuated my strengths and hired personnel to assist my weaknesses.
>
> District hired an excellent business manager-A Woman. We have more money now than we've ever had. Our budget DOES our educational plan.

Women learned what they needed to know about school business management by gaining additional knowledge through education, working with knowledgeable people, gaining experience working in the business area, and then found opportunities to put their knowledge to use.

Overcoming Constraints Concerning Political Knowledge and Skills.

Five percent (n = 14) of U.S. superintendents and 16% (n = 16) California superintendents chose to specifically address the perception that women lack political skills. Women in both groups sought out experiences in the political arena, talked and listened to knowledgeable people, networked, prepared themselves, and communicated their successes. Comments highlight their involvement, their use of communication skills to become involved and the need to publicize personal accomplishments.

> I overcame this constraint by gaining experience in this arena. As an assistant superintendent I volunteered to chair politically charged committees such as studies on sex education & 55 years later chaired a committee which was formed to review a parental complaint about classroom materials used in the sex ed.
>
> Women need to highlight their political accomplishments. Again, communication is a key as is a conscious effort to get to know the politics as they stand in one's position.
>
> -became an expert in negotiations, demonstrated problem-solving and collaboration skills with unions and school boards.
>
> Paid attention to the political arena, learned well, used information to grow
>
> Took risks in safe environments and accepted advice from both male and female colleagues, did not shy from being involved in leadership roles.
>
> Attitude: always playing it straight, always doing the right thing for the right reason, advocating the right thing despite opposition. Consistency: doing what you said you would. Respecting differences: Working together to solve problems. Honesty, integrity. Getting in and getting the facts. Learning.
>
> I've had a great deal of PR, choose my words, and don't waiver on decisions.

One women did not believe she had overcome the political aspects of the superintendency. She stated, "Have not overcome this; have a personal problem with the necessity of being politically active for education which should be outside of politics." The other respondents were candid about the need to be active politically in the district and to be perceived as competent in that area.

Overcoming the Lack of Encouragement to Become Administrators. Five percent (n = 13) of the U. S. respondents addressed this issue as well as 9% (n = 12) of the California respondents. Intensive preparation for the role along with persistence, tenacity, and demonstrating competence are the themes woven through the superintendents' comments.

> I addressed this by preparing myself in every single area to the fullest extent possible within my capability. Became certified in eleven areas. Received doctorate. Obtained experience. Became better than the best. Persistence/Hard work/Development of Skills.

> (After negative reaction in college classes...) ...I did work hard to turn in work as perfect as I could do it. This personal satisfaction carried me along.

> This was so evident, it was laughable. One elementary principal (out of 2 dozen administrators in my former district) dared to quietly encourage me. I knew I had more skill and dedication than they did so I forged on believing in myself and encouraged by my husband and children.

> Joined female support groups. I ignored it-and worked from within myself.

> Finding out about training programs and asserting myself.

One woman commented on encouragement from many people, saying, "As

my career unfolded, encouragement came from a number of significant people. I am one lucky lady--I met people who believe in me before I believe in myself." Conversely, another superintendent commented, "After 7 years in the superintendency, I still struggle with lack of encouragement and virtually no role models. A woman superintendent needs courage to keep a viable confidence level.

Respondents chose the lack of encouragement as a significant constraint on their careers and these written comments indicate various levels of support these women received from others. Respondents to the question of overcoming this constraint mentioned increasing their skills and persisting in goals that they set to gain the superintendency for themselves.

Superintendents in both the U.S. study and the California study mentioned qualities necessary to overcome the constraints on their career path: tenacity, patience, perseverance, and building self-confidence. They emphasized: seeking out knowledge and information from all available sources, establishing a solid reputation, having the necessary education, being politically active, and finding male and female mentors who could be helpful sources of knowledge and influence.

Discussion and Conclusions

Women in both groups of superintendents were well prepared academically. Over half of the women in both groups had earned doctorate degrees. An additional 16% of the national group had specialist degrees. Women superintendents in the national study and the California study have a higher percentage of doctorate

degrees than the national population (36.9%) of superintendents as reported by Glass (1992). School boards are choosing women with doctorate degrees to be superintendents of schools.

Comparing mean constraints ranked first by both groups, "the difficulty women experience breaking into existing organizational networks," indicated that this constraint is more critical for the national group of superintendents than those superintendents from California (see Table 3). The constraint may be somewhat less critical for California superintendents because of the increasing numbers of women in their ranks. California women superintendents, even though they constituted 18% of the superintendents in the state, continued, however, to perceive this constraint as the most critical on their careers. The strategies both groups used to overcome the difficulty of breaking into educational networks should have value to other women seeking the position of superintendent.

Women in both groups perceived male and female mentors as important both inside and outside professional organizations. Northcraft & Gutek, (1993) addressed the importance of mentors and the increasing population of women executives in business saying, "...as the number of women in management continues to grow, the problem of management women not having other women with whom to network should decrease. Increased numbers of women superintendents may provide more networking opportunities for women. Women superintendents in these two groups sought to network in professional

organizations and sought opportunities to show their abilities. They stressed the need for persistence in trying to break into networks, but they obtained expert advice from helpful individuals if they were unable to gain assistance through traditional networks.

Superintendents are expected to be knowledgeable in school business management. Discussing the public's strong interest in school business management, Konnert and Augenstein (1990, p. 159) comment that, "in the final analysis, the person who makes the fiscal decisions also makes the educational decisions." California superintendents did not rank "the belief that women are not proficient in school business management" as one of the top constraints, although it was ranked second by U. S. women. National respondents emphasized becoming an expert in business management. They used all available resources, classes, workshops, and state academies, to become proficient in business management skills and looked for opportunities to display their expertise. In a parallel approach to overcoming this constraint, U. S. women wrote about hiring very competent men or women to bring business management expertise to their management teams.

The constraint, "the belief that men are more able than women to handle the political aspects of the superintendency, " was overcome by both groups by becoming involved with different publics. Several women mentioned the need to take risks and to handle difficult situations successfully. Successful accomplishment of difficult tasks is one of the methods also used in gaining access to professional

networks. This strategy appeared to echo the conclusion expressed in Kanter's research (1977) that recognition of promising leaders came through being given and accomplishing difficult tasks within organizations.

"The lack of organizational encouragement for women to apply for administrative positions," was also a critical constraint for women in both studies. Respondents emphasized the need for persistence and continual demonstration of competency in order to get recognized. They, however, until they had obtained the superintendency were not in a position to change the nature of this constraint. Although these women wrote about the strategies they used to personally overcome this constraint, they did not mention any specific strategies to assist other women administrators who might need encouragement. They did, however, write about being part of women's support groups and networking with other women. As the number of women superintendents increase, there may be a natural progression in the amount of mentoring as well as networking that occurs between women administrators.

There are consistent themes running through the strategies to overcome the four constraints ranked by both groups of women superintendents.

- Be as well prepared as possible.
- Seek out mentors and the necessary knowledge and skills wherever opportunities exist.
- Take on difficult roles and do them well. Let other people know about your successes.

In this paper an analysis was made comparing the ratings of perceived constraints on their careers chosen by U. S. and California superintendents on the SIFSC survey. The national group of superintendents and the superintendents from California showed much similarity in the choice and rating of those constraints . The mean constraints were higher for U. S. superintendents than for California superintendents although there was only a significant difference on the mean constraint, "the difficulty women experience in breaking into existing organizational networks" (p =.03).

It is possible that constraints may be perceived differently in California because of the larger percentage of women superintendents in the state compared to the percentage of women superintendents nationally. Further research may assist in clarifying the role that a critical mass of women administrators may play in changing the receptivity to women in the superintendent's role.

Women are increasingly seeking doctorate degrees in Educational Administration (Snyder, 1989), so there is an every increasing pool of women prepared to be district leaders. This study would appear to indicate that universities could assist women by preparing them with the kinds of business skills they need to attain and providing opportunities for networking and mentoring. School districts might consider organized programs which encourage emerging female leaders, providing mentors in the district, and giving them opportunities to learn about district and community politics.

As women continue to attain higher degrees in the field of Educational Administration, occupy an increasing number of superintendent positions, and mentor each other, some of the constraints identified by these women may start to decrease.

References

American Association for Employment in Education. (1996). Directory of public school systems in the United States. (22nd ed.). Evanston, IL: Author.

Bateson, M. C., (1990). Composing a Life. New York, NY: Penquin Books.

Belenky, M. F.; Clinchy, B. M.; Goldberger, N. R.; & Tarule, J. M. (1986). Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind. New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc.

Blumberg, A. (1985). The school superintendent: Living with conflict. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Burns, B. D. (1995). Female superintendents: A study in public schools in Missouri. University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AK.

Carpenter, M. D. (1994). A study of female superintendents of schools in Arkansas (women administrators). Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AK.

Carter, G. R. & Cunningham, W. G. (1997). The American school superintendent: Leading in an age of pressure. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass Publishers.

Covey, S. R. (1990). Principled-centered leadership. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Dobberteen, K. W. (1996). Perceptions of women superintendents regarding their roles and career constraints: a comparative study. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AR

Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Glass, T. (1992). The 1992 study of the American school superintendency. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

Goodman, R. H., Fulbright, L., and Zimmerman, W. G. Jr. (1997). Getting there from here. Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service.

Grogan, M. (1994, April). Aspiring to the superintendency in the public school systems: Women's perspectives. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

Helgesen, S. (1990). The female advantage: Women's ways of leadership. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Helgesen, S. (1995). The web of inclusion. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Kanter, R. M. (1977). Men and women of the corporation. New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc.

Konnert, M. W., & Augenstein, J. J. (1990). The superintendency in the nineties: What superintendents and board members need to know. Lancaster, PA: Technomic Publishing Company.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (1993). Leadership practices inventory: A self-assessment and analysis. San Diego, CA: Pfeiffer & Co.

Northcraft, G. B. & Gutek, B. A. (1993). Point-counterpoint: Discrimination against women in management--going, going, gone or going but never gone. In E. A. Fagenson (Eds.) Women in management (pp. 219-246). Newbury Park, CA: Sage

Publications

McCabe, D. H. (1991). Survey of Influences on female superintendents' careers. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida.

McCabe, D. H. (1992). An examination of the perceptions of female superintendents of schools concerning constraints on their careers and the careers of other women administrators. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL.

Morgan, G. (1997). Images of organization (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, MD: Sage Publications.

Ortiz, F. I. (1982). Career patterns in education. South Hadley, MA: J. F. Bergin Publishers Books.

Patterson, J. L., Purkey, S. C., & Parker, J. V. (1986). Productive school systems for a nonrational world. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Senge, P. M. (1990). The fifth discipline: The art of practice the learning organization. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Shakeshaft, C. (1989). Women in educational administration. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Snyder, T. D. (Ed.).(1989). Digest of educational statistics. Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office.

Tannen, D. (1994). Talking from 9 to 5, Women and men in the workplace: Language, sex and power. New York, NY: William Morrow and Co.

Wesson, L. H. & Grady, M. L. (1994). National study of women superintendents using the leadership practices inventory. A paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

Wesson, L. H., & Grady, M. L. (1994). The Leadership Challenge: A National Study of Women Superintendents. Paper presented at the annual meeting of The American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

Wheatley, M. J. (1992). Leadership and the new science: Learning about organizations from an orderly universe. San Francisco, CA: Berrett Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Appendix A

Constraints on Women Superintendent's Careers

"...The 35 items below represent conditions, beliefs, attitudes or suppositions about women in our society..."

1. The lack of female role models within organizations.
2. The lack of organizational recruitment of women for appropriate training programs.
3. The belief that women lack understanding of school district financing.
4. The expectation in one's own family that women become teachers, but not administrators.
5. The absence of career women as role models in one's family.
6. The belief that men are more able than women to handle the political aspects of the superintendency.
7. The belief that women are not proficient in school business management.
8. The belief that women are not assertive.
9. The lack of organizational encouragement for women to apply for administrative positions.
10. The belief that women lack career commitment.
11. The personal belief that women teach; men manage.
12. The belief that men are more physically able to handle the demands of the superintendency than are women.
13. The difficulty women experience breaking into existing organizational networks.
14. The belief that women lack an authoritative approach to getting the job done.
15. The belief that women are not knowledgeable about or interested in building maintenance.
16. The belief that men are able to work the long hours expected of a school district superintendent.
17. The belief that women are not forceful spokespersons.
18. The belief that women lack self-confidence in their own judgment.
19. The belief that men are more capable than women in union negotiations.
20. The belief in our society that women are responsible for the care of children in families.
21. The societal belief that women are to be nurturers.
22. The personal belief that mothers should stay home with young children.
23. The greater value placed by our society on graduate education for men than on graduate education for women.
24. The belief that women use their sexuality to get ahead.
25. The lack of encouragement in our society for women to be executives.
26. The belief that women do not keep information private.
27. The lack of mentors available for you/other women within organizations.
28. The belief in one's family that women are expected to be available for family activities.
29. The expectation in our society that women are to be supportive rather than authoritative.
30. The lack of encouragement in one's family to set lifetime career goals.
31. The personal belief that women should consider their husbands' careers more important than their own.
32. The personal belief that mothers should take primary responsibility for the care and nurturing of children in the family.
33. The personal belief that women should put their families first; their careers second.
34. The lack of encouragement in one's family for higher education for women.
35. The belief that women are not objective.